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Articles in Today's Clips Friday, May 4, 2007

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May 3, 2007

Westland mom accused of stuffing baby in bag free on bond

Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

WESTLAND -- A Westland woman accused of leaving her newborn son to die in a plastic trash bag last month may have been in the throes of postpartum depression, her lawyer says.

Attorney Barry Resnick raised the theory today, when 18th District Judge Gail McKnight granted a delay in proceedings against Valeeka Noelle Gartrell, 27, to allow time for a private psychiatric examination.

She is charged with attempted murder and first-degree child abuse for allegedly discarding her baby shortly after his birth April 23, then having herself taken to a hospital for what was thought to be pre-birth complications.

"There's an excellent chance she was suffering from postpartum depression when this happened," Resnick said. "It doesn't make sense, how she appeared and what she said to people and at the hospital."

The infant was found alive by Gartrell's stepfather, who rushed home from the hospital when told by medical workers that she had given birth. The man told police he found the infant by following its cries. Gartrell had been living with her parents.

The baby reportedly is in good health in the custody of the state's Child Protective Services. Police and hospital workers estimate the child had been inside the bag for between three and four hours.

Gartrell posted bond today and walked from Wayne County Jail after the judge reduced bond from \$100,000 cash to \$50,000 cash surety, which means payment of \$5,000 secured her release.

The preliminary hearing is due to resume May 31.

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May 4, 2007

Westland

Newborn's mom faces mental exam

Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

WESTLAND -- A Westland woman accused of leaving her newborn son in a plastic trash bag last week may have been in the throes of postpartum depression, her lawyer says.

Valeeka Noelle Gartrell, 27, was released from jail on a reduced bond Thursday, the same day 18th District Judge Gail McKnight delayed proceedings to allow for a psychiatric evaluation.

Gartrell is charged with attempted murder and first-degree child abuse on claims she discarded the baby shortly after his birth April 23, then went to the hospital for what were believed to be pre-birth complications.

"There's an excellent chance she was suffering from postpartum depression when this happened," said defense attorney Barry Resnick. "It doesn't make sense, how she appeared and what she said to people and at the hospital."

The infant was found alive by Gartrell's stepfather, who rushed home from the hospital when medical workers told him she had already given birth.

The man told police he found the infant in his garage by following its cries. Police and hospital workers estimate the child was in the bag three to four hours.

The baby reportedly is in good health and in the temporary custody of Gartrell's mother and stepfather, along with Gartrell's 3-year-old. A custody hearing is set for Tuesday in Wayne County Probate Court, said Resnick.

Resnick declined to say if his client has a record of depression or other psychological difficulties.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Michael Woodyard didn't object to the delay, but argued that Gartrell appeared rational in court when she answered routine questions from McKnight.

Resnick said Gartrell was in tears while explaining to the judge that she would comply with her bond by living with a cousin, wearing an electronic tether and having no contact with children.

"I don't believe she fully comprehends what's happening," Resnick said.

Gartrell was released after the judge lowered bond from \$100,000 cash to \$50,000 cash surety, which allowed her to post \$5,000. The preliminary examination is due to resume May 31.

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More charges for mom who allegedly tried selling daughter, 7, for sex

May 3, 2007

By ZLATI MEYER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Taylor mother already charged with trying to sell her 7-year-old daughter for sex is facing two additional charges -- criminal sexual abuse and using the Internet to commit a crime.

The additional charges were announced during her preliminary exam today in 31st District Court in Hamtramck.

The 33-year-old mother of five, whose name is being withheld to protect her kids' identities, now is facing seven counts of child sexual abuse, using the Internet to commit a crime and prostitution. She's being held on \$1 million bond.

Prosecutors say she offered her daughter to a man on the Internet, who actually was an undercover Wayne County Sheriff's deputy. The woman was arrested March 30 at a Romulus hotel where they had arranged to meet.

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Police: Suspect List Narrows In Jeffries Case

POSTED: 5:51 pm EDT May 3, 2007
UPDATED: 7:50 am EDT May 4, 2007

ROMULUS, Mich. -- For months her killer has been out there, and Rescue 4 revealed on Thursday that Romulus police may be closer to solving the slaying of 7-year-old Raven Jeffries, who was killed last summer.

Jeffries' mother, Brenda, said she recently discovered a video on her cell phone that she did not know was there, and it was filmed by Raven. The video was shot the same day Raven disappeared and it shows her singing and dancing.

Brenda Jeffries shared the video with Local 4 while standing in a memorial garden that she dedicated to her daughter.

"With this here people will see that, that this is how much I'm grieving over my daughter," she said of her memorial.

Police said the 7-year-old's badly burned body was discovered a few days after she was reported missing last August, and her mother said she knows who did it.

"They're not going to get away with it. Not as long as I'm living," she said. "I don't understand how anybody could do this to a child and not even have no remorse. They have no remorse at all."

Romulus police Detective Dwayne Decaires said he has been on the case from the very beginning, working daily to try and solve it.

"I've been doing this for over 20 years. This will be the one case that will stick with me for the rest of my career and probably the rest of my life," he said. "The person that's able to do this is not just violent and cruel but just a very evil person. "

Officials said the results of DNA samples sent to labs in Quantico, Va., and the Michigan State Police are expected back at the end of May.

Tips generated from America's Most Wanted confirm what police said they suspected.

Police said the suspect list has also narrowed considerably.

A memorial fund was established for Raven Jeffries and contributions can be made at any Comerica Bank location.

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Video: Police: Suspect List Narrows In Jeffries Case

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Article published May 3, 2007

Cass County fugitive mom found in Ohio

Woman to face charge in disabled son's death

By CAROL DRAEGER
Tribune Staff Writer

A Cass County woman wanted for manslaughter in the death of her disabled son was taken into custody in Ohio and will soon be extradited to Michigan, authorities said.

Tina Gullett, of Jones, has eluded police since a warrant was issued for her arrest two months ago.

Cass County Prosecuting Attorney Victor Fitz charged Gullett, the mother of four, with manslaughter March 12.

Gullett's oldest child, Peyton Jenkins, suffered from diabetes and cystic fibrosis when he died in her care June 14, according to court records.

A few weeks later, officials from Michigan's Child Protective Services began looking into whether Gullett's other children, girls ages, 3, 5 and 6, should be placed in foster care.

During a Sept. 18 settlement conference to determine if the children should be moved to foster care, Gullett pleaded no contest to failing to follow through with medical care for Peyton.

She also pleaded no contest to causing her children to miss school frequently because she moved periodically from Michigan to Ohio, where her husband apparently lives.

She lost custody of the girls following the conference hearing and the children have been in foster care ever since.

Cass County Family Court Judge Susan Dobrich ordered that both parents, Tina and Harry Gullett, be stripped of their parental rights March 15.

The Gulletts did not appear in court for the termination trial.

A few days before the trial, Fitz signed a warrant for Tina Gullett's arrest in Peyton's death.

Based on detailed information from child care workers, prosecutors said Peyton allegedly did not receive proper medical care and died as a result of neglect.

Fitz said he was notified April 18 by authorities in southern Ohio that Gullett had been picked up in Ironton, near the Kentucky border.

Gullett is being held in the Lawrence County Jail on the Michigan charges, said a jail official.

Gullett waived extradition during a 1 p.m. hearing in Ohio on Thursday, which means she will not contest the order to be brought back to Michigan.

"She is also facing felony theft charges in Lawrence County, however, they will be releasing her to return to Michigan," Fitz said.

Gullett is expected to be transported to Michigan within the next two weeks, Fitz said.

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Article published May 3, 2007

Prosecutor: McBurney 'confessed to crime'

By Alyson Iott
STAFF WRITER

A South Lyon man accused of killing his infant daughter last December returned to the 52-1 District Court in Novi for a preliminary hearing April 27. Steven Lindsey McBurney, 31, was charged Dec. 5 with first-degree child abuse and felony murder in the death of his 11-month-old daughter, Madison.

Three witnesses, including McBurney's wife of two years, testified against him during the nearly five-hour hearing in Judge Brian MacKenzie's courtroom.

Heather McBurney, 34, strained to keep her voice steady during her 90-minute testimony. She described the events of Nov. 30, when Madison was rushed to the University of Michigan Hospital after a reported seizure, through Dec. 4, when she was taken off life support after doctors declared her brain-dead.

On Nov. 30, Heather said her daughter woke up sick and cranky. She vomited several times, but seemed to be feeling better by the time Heather left at 6 p.m. for her job as a registered nurse in Ann Arbor.

The last time she saw her daughter, Heather said, she was playing with toys in her crib.

Around 7 p.m., McBurney called her at work and said that Madison "collapsed," and was being taken to the hospital.

McBurney was arrested Dec. 4 after an interview at the hospital by Sgt. Chris Sovik and Det. Chris Sederlund of the South Lyon Police Department.

Sovik testified that McBurney told them he threw Madison into her crib from about two feet away when she would not stop crying.

The infant's head hit the wooden bars of the crib and she began to have a seizure, according to McBurney's statement.

Defense attorney Robert F. White attempted to show that McBurney's oral statement was obtained improperly, since he was not read his Miranda rights.

MacKenzie ruled that McBurney had been free to leave the conference room where Sovik and Sederlund interviewed him before his statement. Since the interview was not a custodial interrogation, MacKenzie ruled, the requirement to Mirandize a suspect did not apply.

He also ruled that a written statement McBurney gave shortly after his oral statement was inadmissible as evidence. Sovik and Sederlund should have read McBurney his Miranda rights before requesting the statement, MacKenzie said.

Losing the written statement as evidence will not hurt the prosecution's case, said Asst. Prosecutor John Skrzynski.

"(McBurney's) statement about what he did to the baby is corroborated by Dr. (Ljubisa) Dragovic's findings on autopsy," Skrzynski said. "That is the crime. He confessed to the crime."

During Heather McBurney's testimony, White asked her about Madison's illness and her existing medical conditions, including hip dysplasia and aplasia cutis congenita (ACC), a rare skin condition that caused open wounds on her scalp. He asked about recent medical procedures related to the ACC, including a MRI on Aug. 31 and a CAT scan on Sept. 11. Finally, he asked if Madison had acted as though her head or neck were hurting her on Nov. 30.

If a medical condition is found to have caused Madison's death, McBurney may be convicted on a lesser count of child abuse and avoid the felony murder charge. Knowledge and intent to do serious harm is a crucial component of first-degree child abuse.

The fact that McBurney pleaded guilty to abusing his four-month-old son in Northville nine years ago suggests that he knew his actions toward Madison could cause severe injury or death, Skrzynski argued.

Sgt. Paul Sumner of the Northville Police Department testified that McBurney admitted to shaking the infant when he wouldn't stop crying, causing a non-fatal skull fracture. He was charged with first-degree child abuse and received four years' probation after pleading guilty to second-degree child abuse in 1998.

The child's mother, McBurney's girlfriend, was at work when the abuse occurred.

Sumner also testified that when he asked McBurney about scars on his knuckles and forehead, he said they were caused by an "anger issue" when he was younger.

McBurney's father, Jim McBurney, watched and took notes throughout the hearing.

Jim, who lives in Cadillac, said he had not seen his son for several years before learning of his arrest from a family member.

"It blindsided me totally," he said.

He and his ex-wife have been taking turns visiting their son in the Oakland County Jail for his weekly 30-minute visitation.

"With something like this, it just impacts the whole family," Jim said. "We're all still grieving. So now we're just going to go through the judicial process and see what happens."

He has never met Heather, his daughter-in-law. The first time he saw her, Jim said, was during her testimony.

"I feel so bad for her," he said. "In one day, she lost everything."

The hearing was adjourned until May 17, when Oakland County Medical Examiner Ljubisa Dragovic will testify on the cause of Madison's death.

"I think the proofs are going to show that the cause of death was blunt-force trauma caused by the child banging her head against the crib," Skrzynski said. "We've shown what happened; now we have to show that (McBurney) caused her death."

With both McBurney's confession and Dragovic's expert testimony in the prosecution's favor, Skrzynski said, "I think that we have enough proof beyond a reasonable doubt."

If convicted of felony murder, McBurney will receive a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole.

Alyson Iott is a reporter for the South Lyon Herald. She can be reached at (248) 437-2011, or by e-mail at aiott@gannett.com.

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The Daily Telegram

[Print Page](#)**FRIDAY MAY 4, 2007** Last modified: *Thursday, May 3, 2007 3:15 PM EDT*

Day care owner pleads 'not guilty'

A trial is scheduled for Aug. 1 and 2 in the case of Douglas Jay Clark, who is accused of abusing children at a day care.

From staff reports

ADRIAN — A “not guilty” plea was entered Wednesday in Lenawee County Circuit Court for day care center operator Douglas Jay Clark on 70 counts of criminal sexual conduct involving six children he allegedly abused at his home-based business on Erie Street in Adrian.

Clark, 52, appeared only briefly before Judge Harvey A. Koselka where his “not guilty” plea was entered by public defender John Glaser. Koselka scheduled an initial trial for Aug. 1 and 2. A hearing was called for Wednesday next week to discuss what cases could be tried together and in what order the multiple cases might be tried.

No mention was made of a potential plea agreement. Clark was returned to jail where he has been held in lieu of a \$5 million bond since he was arrested after a police investigation was started March 9.

Child pornography, computer crime, extortion, marijuana possession and felony firearm charges were added March 30 to an initial batch of criminal sex counts that were filed against Clark on March 12 and 14 by the Lenawee County prosecutor's office.

The investigation has been completed and no additional charges are being sought against Clark, said Detective Sgt. Lynn Courington of the Adrian Police Department.

Clark is accused of sexually molesting children ranging from infants to teenagers from 2004 through his arrest in March. There have been more allegations of child sexual abuse dating further back, Courington said, including one complaint that is past the 20-year statute of limitations.

The investigation began March 9 when a woman reported to police that Clark was sending sexual messages over the Internet to her while she was logged in as her son on her computer.

Police reported finding videotapes at Clark's home that he allegedly made of himself sexually abusing infants.

Clark faces 65 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct that carry maximum life prison terms.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



Man arrested in suspected molestation at day care

POLICE BLOTTER

GRAND BLANC TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Friday, May 04, 2007

By Ken Palmer

kpalmer@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6313

GRAND BLANC TWP. - A man has been charged with fondling a 4-year-old child at a day care center run by his wife, authorities said.

Jerry Anderson, 61, was free on a \$420,000 bond after his arraignment last week on a charge of second-degree criminal sexual conduct in Central District Court, Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton said.

Township police declined to identify the day care center or discuss details of the case, saying it remained under investigation.

- Ken Palmer

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www.record-eagle.com

05/03/2007

News in brief

Cheboygan man guilty of sexual abuse

FROM STAFF REPORTS

CHEBOYGAN — A Cheboygan man convicted of three counts of criminal sexual conduct against a victim less than 13 years old will serve up to 15 years in state prison.

James Sale Sawyer, Jr., 45, was sentenced Tuesday in 53rd Circuit Court in Cheboygan. He was convicted of forcing a young girl to perform sexual acts on him over a period of years, beginning when the child was 5 years old.

Sawyer lived in Inverness Township at the time. He was arrested in January.

The victim eventually told her mother and police about the sexual abuse, said Mickey Castagne, Cheboygan County prosecuting attorney.

Sawyer was remanded to the Michigan Department of Corrections.

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Article published May 3, 2007

Prosecutor brings message of child abuse reporting to school district staff

BY SUE BUCK
HOME TOWN LIFE STAFF WRITER

Oakland County Chief Deputy Prosecutor Deborah Carley gave high marks recently to an updated draft policy on child abuse.

The policy, drafted by Estralee Michaelson, Farmington Public Schools executive director for safe schools and student services, will be used by Farmington Public Schools employees, who are required to report child abuse and criminal sexual conduct.

"Farmington's policy is a phenomenal policy," Carley said, who spoke at the Maxfield Training Center. "It is a step in the right direction."

She also complimented the competency of the Farmington Public Safety Department and the Farmington Hills Police Department with whom the school district works.

Carley spoke to district employees and local law enforcement officials to update them on protocols, which is timely for FPS's efforts.

"I was charged this year with rewriting all of the policies and procedures regarding child protection," Michaelson said.

The original district policy was developed in 1991.

Michaelson has asked for more input from employees. The final policy will be approved by the board of education.

"Everything" has changed regarding schools and children, according to Carley.

"We used to send our children to school and knew that it was a safe place to be," she said. "Children spend the majority of their time at school."

With incidents like Columbine and Virginia Tech, things are different today.

School employees are often faced with making decisions about reporting suspicious incidents "at the end of the school day or Friday afternoons," when time is limited, she said.

She urged employees to be aware of incidents which aren't "accidental."

It's not unusual for third graders to have bruised shins from roughhousing. What should signal alarm are belt marks, bleeding and linear marks on the back of a child's knees, she said.

The police and prosecutor will determine what is accidental or not accidental.

"If you have suspicions, that's all you need to have," Carley said. "If there is a mark left, it is inappropriate discipline. If there is an object being used, it is inappropriate."

Taking a photo of an injury can speak volumes, Carley said.

The more attachments to a report submitted, the better. "Give them as many specifics as you can," Carley said.

Prosecutors are interested in knowing who did the injury and also about those around that child "who didn't help," Carley said.

"I dislike no one more than the parent who said, 'Yea, I knew.' or they let it go on and on and on," Carley said.



Student in fight faces charge for unrelated voice mail threat

'I feel like it is progress,' says father of victim of alleged attack

By Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A young man accused of instigating an after-school brawl April 25 is facing a juvenile criminal charge for a separate instance involving some of his same adversaries at L'Anse Creuse Middle School East, police and parents revealed Thursday.

Also on Thursday, school officials revealed they are removing one of the alleged victims in the altercation from a math class where a teacher was accused of encouraging other students to assault him, prior to the fight.

The alleged instigator, whose name is being withheld by The Macomb Daily because of his age, faces a single charge of malicious use of a telecommunications device, a 6-month misdemeanor offense, for allegedly leaving a voice mail message threatening harm to 13-year-old Kai Dooley of Chesterfield Township.

The student is also under criminal investigation along with several other students for the April 25 altercation immediately after classes were dismissed on the middle school campus. Dooley's family claims the boy and at least nine other students ganged up on Kai and beat him to the point of unconsciousness, for which he required medical treatment.

"I feel like it is progress. The system is at least starting to take some action," said John Dooley, Kai's father. "But there are 10-11 other aggressors against my son who are not charged with anything; they're still in school along with him and nothing's happening to them for it."

Chesterfield Township police Detective Joseph Feld confirmed the voice-mail threat charges were being brought in juvenile court against one of the alleged aggressors, but he has yet to make his formal court appearance on that case and it is unrelated to the fight.

"That one is going to take us a lot longer to sort out. There are a lot of accounts to go over in the case," Feld said of the alleged group assault. "Until we do, we're not ready to go forward with anything on that as of yet."

The fight broke out shortly after Kai's gym class, where roughly 10 boys allegedly ganged up on him.

Officials seem to agree that Kai was not the primary aggressor, but he and his twin brother Liam Dooley were both briefly suspended afterward for their participation.

The Dooley family contends an associate principal, Erik Edoff, came to talk to Kai during gym class saying he knew the fight was coming and asking him to avoid it or not to fight back when it occurs.

A school official has said six students were disciplined to varying degrees following the fight, and confirmed the Dooleys' account that four were suspended -- both the Dooley children, the primary aggressor on the other side now facing the criminal charge, and his friend.

Edoff also allegedly granted a request this week by the Dooleys to move one or both of their children out of the classroom of a math instructor who allegedly enticed other students to fight him. L'Anse Creuse administrative officials acknowledge they investigated their employee in that accusation but found no grounds to discipline her.

Edoff would not comment on the transfer request or on whether he had foreknowledge of the fight. Superintendent DiAnne Pellerin confirmed the transfer was granted but noted that it was not because of any suspected wrongdoing.

"We did respond to (the Dooleys)' request. When parents make requests to transfer a child into or out of an instructor's (class), we make reasonable accommodations for those requests."

Pellerin declined to comment further.

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/050407/loc_vmailthreat001.shtml



Muskegon Chronicle

Youth pleads no contest to arson

Friday, May 04, 2007

FROM LOCAL REPORTS

A 13-year-old Muskegon Heights boy has pleaded no contest to three counts of arson of a dwelling house for setting a fire that drove him and his family from their home and damaged two neighbors' homes.

Johnnie Griggs pleaded to the charges as a juvenile Wednesday before Chief 14th Circuit Judge John C. Ruck, sitting as a Family Court judge.

Ruck ordered the boy released from the Muskegon County Juvenile Detention Center and placed with his grandmother, required him to complete an arson assessment and referred him to the county's Balanced and Restorative Justice Program, which brings victims and offenders together to agree on appropriate amends.

A disposition hearing, at which Griggs' sentence will be determined, will be scheduled later.

The blaze happened Feb. 22 at the Griggs home at 2628 Leahy. Officials said the boy was angry at his mother and purposely set a fire in her bedroom.

Johnnie Griggs, his 18-year-old sister and her 2-year-old son escaped the burning home around 11:30 a.m. Other family members, including Griggs' mother, 38-year-old Lucinda McDonald, were away at the time.

Fire officials said the boy admitted setting the fire on his mother's bed using a lighter and paper. Home from school due to being suspended, Griggs was angry because his mother would not let him go along when she took his grandmother to the hospital, according to police and fire reports.

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The insulting unfairness should offend all

May 4, 2007

BY ROCHELLE RILEY

FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Two things happened recently that remind us why relations between different races and the haves and have-nots in America -- and in Michigan -- are so poor:

First: Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca asked a judge to forgive a bank robber's transgression because he was desperate and faced homelessness. The defendant, a 60-year-old white male, got nine months instead of the years that most defendants get.

The judge didn't ask Gorcyca how many other defendants he prosecuted while simultaneously asking for leniency. She didn't ask the race of other defendants he helped send to prison for longer times. And she didn't ask whether he would reopen the cases of any other desperate, near homeless men with few options. However many there are, I'd urge them all to sue the county. If they're black, they should sue twice.

Second: Two weeks after shock jock Don Imus was fired, shock jock Rush Limbaugh began playing a little ditty on his radio program called "Barack, the Magic Negro." Think "Puff, the Magic Dragon."

Now, Barack Obama is no female college basketball player, so Limbaugh, unlike Imus, did pick on someone his own size. (Actually, he picked on someone bigger, smarter and more relevant than he is.)

And Obama, when asked about it on WJR's Paul W. Smith show Wednesday morning, said he wasn't bothered. He's right. If elected, he won't have time to answer every kook who calls him a name.

But that doesn't mean black folks shouldn't be bothered. It doesn't mean fair-minded Americans of any color should put up with racist, boorish, behavior on the national airwaves.

Limbaugh was just taking a stand, proving that racists, like roaches, don't go away when you kill just one. Obama doesn't have to be offended, but I'm sick of people like Limbaugh using the airwaves to emit garbage that might offend my child or any other children.

This nation and this state, for too long, have operated using different rules for different people. Haves follow one set of rules; have-nots, another. Most whites follow one set of rules, most minorities another.

The Oakland prosecutor has shredded ethics policies so often, it seems folly to mention it: He tapped into a police database to check the background of a judge he thought was wrong; conducted a sloppy, failed prosecution of an Oak Park kindergarten teacher for child abuse; declared publicly that an attorney he couldn't prosecute was guilty of blackmail (Did Geoffrey Fieger ever sue for slander?), and announced on the radio that his office was taking bets on when recently released killer Nathaniel Abraham would be back in jail.

Every attorney for every client Gorcyca has prosecuted should demand a new trial and call for federal civil rights violation investigations.

Letting one bank robber off with a slap on the wrist while others rot in jail is not only unfair but un-American. But then, being un-American is the thing that Limbaugh and Gorcyca have most in common. Oh, and this: They both need to be retired.

Read **ROCHELLE RILEY'S** columns at freep.com/rochelleriley. Contact her at riley99@freepress.com or 313-223-4473.

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House OKs Head Start Funding

GOP-Led Religion Amendment Rejected

POSTED: 2:07 pm EDT May 3, 2007

WASHINGTON -- The House approved more money for the popular Head Start program Wednesday after rejecting a GOP-led attempt to allow religious groups participating in the program to hire and fire staffers based on religious grounds.

The bill, passed 365-48, approves \$7.4 billion in spending in fiscal 2008 for the 42-year-old program that helps low-income children prepare for school, up from \$6.9 billion in the current year.

It increases enrollment, now about 900,000 children aged 3 to 5, boosts teacher and staff salaries and expands services for homeless, migrant and non-English-speaking children.

"Head Start has served our most vulnerable children and families well for 42 years, and more recently, Early Head Start has done the same for infants and toddlers," said Rep. Dale Kildee, D-Mich., a chief sponsor. "Head Start works, and this bill will make it work even better."

Before the final vote, Democrats voted down the Republican proposal to change a 1972 Head Start law in order to allow religious groups to take religion into account in hiring. Democrats said that amounted to sanctioning religious discrimination among groups receiving federal money.

Instead, Democrats pushed through an amendment, offered by Rep. Heath Shuler, D-N.C., and several other moderate Democratic freshmen, that confirms the rights of religious groups to participate in Head Start programs on the same basis of other organizations.

If the Senate, now considering a similar bill, and the House come to agreement, it would be the first congressional action on the education, nutrition and health program since the last reauthorization bill expired in 2003. Since then, Congress has voted on money for the program but has been unable to make substantive changes in it.

The White House said it cannot support the bill because of the religion issue and several other provisions, including one to terminate a system of measuring the progress of Head Start children.

It urged the House to change the bill "to ensure that faith-based organizations are not asked to forfeit their religious hiring autonomy as a condition of receiving Head Start grants."

During the last Congress, the GOP-controlled House repealed that provision, but the Head Start bill died when the Senate refused to go along.

"Too often the federal government has ignored or impeded the efforts of faith-based organizations willing to lend a helping hand and providing critical services to the neediest of our communities," said Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon, R-Calif., top Republican on the Education and Labor Committee.

If the provision were appealed, a church group that provides Head Start services could employ child-care workers belonging only to that denomination, rejecting equally qualified workers of other religions.

Republicans argued that the 1964 Civil Rights Act carves out a religious exemption and that President Clinton signed several bills, including the 1996 welfare reform bill, that included "charitable choice" provisions giving religious groups receiving federal funds some discretion in hiring.

Opponents pointed out that the Civil Rights Act exemption applies to religious groups using their own funds in hiring, not federal funds. They said Clinton, in signing the charitable choice bills, issued signing statements barring the federal funding of "pervasively sectarian" organizations.

The Coalition Against Religious Discrimination, representing 70 religious, civil rights and labor groups, said the repeal would be "the first time that Congress has ever acted to repeal existing, statutory anti-discrimination protections."

"Beliefs about religion should play no role in the hiring of professionals to carry out Head Start duties," said the Rev. Barry Lynn,

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executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The Head Start bill also expands Head Start eligibility to those earning 130 percent of the poverty level, or \$26,845 annually. The current ceiling is 100 percent of the poverty level, \$20,650.

It terminates the National Reporting System, a program for measuring the progress of Head Start children, to give the National Academy of Science time to develop more accurate standards.

It sets a deadline of 2013 for half of all Head Start classroom teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and increases spending for Early Head Start programs from 12 percent to 20 percent of the total by 2012. New disclosure rules are included to combat waste and abuse in the system.

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Food pantry shelves empty

Friday, May 04, 2007

DENISE FORD-MITCHELL

THE SAGINAW NEWS

No one has to tell Robert Andreotti what's going on with mid-Michigan's economy.

The bare pantry shelves at Saginaw's West Michigan Avenue United Methodist Church tell the 51-year-old director of the church's Outreach Ministries plenty.

"Last month, we fed 250 people, which depleted our stock," Andreotti said. "We typically feed about 80 people a month. This is the first time we've topped 200 people since we opened the pantry five years ago."

The run on food led church officials to temporarily close the pantry, 1802 W. Michigan.

"We'll be closed about three weeks. That will give us time to restock and receive donations from the annual canned-food drive (Saturday, May 12) by postal workers," Andreotti said.

West Michigan parishioners fund the pantry ministry, which has a \$1,200 annual budget. The undertaking also receives donations from the public, the Food Bank of Eastern Michigan and Hidden Harvest, Andreotti said.

"I have a very limited budget, so there's only so much we can do," he said. "I can't spend \$12 for a case of corn. But we desperately need canned goods or donations. We're seeing a lot of new faces ... people who must decide between paying for food, medication or mortgage. The money just isn't there to cover everything any more."

While the state Department of Labor and Economic Growth reported a week ago unemployment in Saginaw County dropped in March to 7.7 percent from 7.9 percent in February, more people apparently are struggling to feed their families.

"We're receiving more requests for food than ever in the past," said Richard Premo, 60, president of Saginaw-based Hidden Harvest. "These are hard times. We keep hearing the economy is improving, but we're certainly not experiencing it around here."

Premo estimates Hidden Harvest will distribute 1.6 million pounds of food this year -- a 400,000-pound increase from last year.

"When it rains, it pours. But we do our best to distribute as much food as we can and go from there," Premo said.

To help offset some of the shortages, West Michigan Avenue United Methodist Church has joined forces with Angel Food Ministries. The Monroe, Ga.-based nonprofit, nondenominational organization began 11 years ago to provide grocery relief to communities throughout the United States.

Under the partnership, individuals pay participating churches, such as West Michigan Avenue, \$25 during the first week of the month and Angel Food Ministries then ships \$45 to \$50 worth of food to the church on the last week of the month, which distributes the goods to enrollees.

Residents may sign up for the project from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday and from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Wednesday at the church. Organizers will distribute the food from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesday, May 29.

To donate to the West Michigan Avenue United Methodist Church pantry, call the church office at 792-4689. v

[Print this Page](#)[Close Window](#)**Governor Granholm Declares Michigan's AmeriCorps Week**

Posted on : 2007-05-03 | Author : Michigan Community Service Commission
News Category : PressRelease

LANSING, Mich., May 3 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today declared the week of May 13, 2007, as Michigan's AmeriCorps Week. The first-ever AmeriCorps Week marks a historic milestone as the 13,500th Michigan's AmeriCorps member takes the pledge to "get things done for America." Nationally, the 500,000th AmeriCorps member will be sworn in.

AmeriCorps Week is a nationwide effort to bring more Americans into service, salute AmeriCorps members and alums for their powerful impact, and thank the community partners who make AmeriCorps possible. The Michigan Community Service Commission, chaired by First Gentleman Daniel G. Mulhern, is coordinating Michigan's AmeriCorps Week activities.

"AmeriCorps members are truly 'walking the walk' in our communities," said Mulhern. "They are rolling up their sleeves and leading by example. They are addressing challenging issues and bringing hope to those in need."

AmeriCorps Week activities are happening all over the state of Michigan including Detroit, Grand Rapids, Benton Harbor, Lansing, Muskegon, Holland, Marquette, Charlevoix, Ionia, Williamston, and Houghton. Projects range in scope from a children's book drive to remodeling a women's shelter to dune restoration. All projects are showcasing the power of AmeriCorps members and alumni and educating people about the role, impact, and importance of AmeriCorps in our communities.

Ask an AmeriCorps member about the children they have taught, houses they have built, or volunteers they have recruited, and you will not only hear numbers, you'll learn the names of students, addresses of new homes, and places where new volunteers have served. This is because AmeriCorps members work directly with the people or causes that need their help the most.

AmeriCorps members take on the challenges their communities face. They believe in the AmeriCorps motto of "getting things done," and are part of the solution. Michigan's AmeriCorps programs are housed within nonprofit organizations, schools, or other agencies. Each program sets its own goals to help meet local education, public safety, environmental, and human needs. The host organizations receive federal funding from the Michigan Community Service Commission to recruit, place, and support AmeriCorps members. These members serve full- or part-time for at least one year to help meet the goals defined by each program. The federal funding is administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

In a recent report released by the MCSC, Michigan's AmeriCorps members: -- Completed nearly 700,000 hours of service and training last year. -- Recruited more than 25,000 volunteers who served more than 158,500 hours in 2006. -- Will earn more than \$3 million in post-service education awards in 2007.

BACKGROUND:

AmeriCorps is commonly described as the "domestic Peace Corps." Individuals, called members, commit to a specific term of service - usually one year - and are housed in nonprofit organizations, schools or other agencies. Michigan's AmeriCorps, administered by the Michigan Community Service Commission, currently has 21 AmeriCorps programs and engages 994 members.

The Michigan Community Service Commission builds a culture of service by providing vision and resources to strengthen communities through volunteerism. In 2006-07, the MCSC is granting more than \$6.2 million in federal funds to local communities for

volunteer programs and activities. The MCSC is housed in the Michigan Department of Human Services, whose mission is to assist children, families, and vulnerable adults to be safe, stable, and self- supporting. The Corporation for National and Community Service grants the federal funding the MCSC administers.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is the nation's largest grantmaker supporting service and volunteering. Through the AmeriCorps, Senior Corps and Learn and Serve America programs, they provide opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to express their patriotism while addressing critical community needs.

Michigan Community Service Commission

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Education, Medicaid cuts bad idea, Granholm told at Livingston meeting

May 3, 2007

By KATHLEEN GRAY

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Cuts to education and Medicaid would be disastrous, a group of Livingston County educators and human services agencies told Gov. Jennifer Granholm today.

"We're seeing a new class of people, the middle class poor," said Nancy Rosso, director of the Livingston County United Way. "An unprecedented number of people are asking for assistance who never have had to ask for help before."

Brighton school officials said they've already cut to the bone and now will be forced to cut programs, increase class size and layoff teachers if the proposed \$125 per pupil cut goes into effect.

Granholm told the crowd of more than 200 people, "You're preaching to the choir. Let your voices be heard to the people who represent you in Lansing."

Granholm has said the state needs to collect more revenue to avoid deep cuts to services.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **Lansing State Journal**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

Published May 4, 2007

Robin Case Naeyaert: Mich. can boost child care, and save money, too

Facing an unprecedented budget crisis, Michigan leaders must make tough choices. Different options to solve the budget crisis exist including spending cuts, tax increases, consolidation of services and "nonprofitization."

Yes, you heard it right - nonprofitization, not privatization. This means increasing the use of licensed, nonprofit providers for foster care, adoption and juvenile justice programs.

Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, sponsored Senate Bill 232, which increases the existing use of community-based service providers for foster care, juvenile justice and adoption programs. SB 232 allows DHS to focus more on oversight, accountability, Federal relationships and using licensed, nationally accredited non-profit providers (DHS is not accredited) for more direct service. SB 232 will not only save Michigan an estimated \$30 million, but will also improve the system to meet the needs of Michigan's most vulnerable population.

Although this seems like a drastic idea, it's only a small change in current practice. This model is already used in most parts of our state and should be welcomed by all of those in favor of providing our kids the best services we can. Kent County has already witnessed the outstanding results of nonprofitization. The community purchases 100 percent of its foster care and adoption services from nationally accredited nonprofit providers, resulting in higher quality care for the county's children and saving substantial amounts of taxpayer dollars.

Nationally, more than 75 percent of states use nonprofit providers to deliver direct child welfare services - and the number is rising.

Under SB 232, DHS would retain some direct foster care services but focus on oversight, using licensing and contract monitoring to assure quality. This allows Michigan to respond quickly to the reforms that are necessary to improve our current system. Also, there's no reason to worry about a net job loss because employee numbers are determined by licensing regulations, not by the state.

The nonprofitization system has built-in quality control mechanisms to make sure nonprofit providers are doing their best to protect Michigan's children. The organizations are accountable to the communities they operate in through their boards of directors and they have the financial backing of the community through donor support - making them more transparent than state-run programs.

Nonprofitization is not a quick fix for Michigan's lagging economy, but a long-term solution to a persistent problem. Our kids deserve better care than what they've been receiving and allowing nonprofit partners to focus on their unique roles and mandating higher standards for providers will make our system better.

It's no secret that Michigan must find a way to better serve our children in foster care, adoption and juvenile justice programs. Our leaders are also obligated to solve the budget crisis. It isn't often that there is a chance to improve the quality of care and save taxpayer dollars simultaneously.

SB 232 offers a common sense solution that will better serve our children and enhance the quality of care offered to Michigan's most vulnerable population - all while freeing \$30 million to help deal with Michigan's immense budget difficulties. We must act now.

Robin Case Naeyaert of Mason is a volunteer with Child & Family Services-Capital Area.

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